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Can the CIA Win Spy War?

"We are in possibly the most menacing period since World War II who believes that the answer to the Soviet challenge lies in how intelligent is our intelligence?"

By Tad Szulc

—In Saudi Arabia, radical plotters are conspiring to overthrow the rulers of the oil kingdom in an ominous replay of the Iranian revolution.

—In strife-ridden Central America, Cuban operatives are secretly delivering weapons to leftist rebels.

—In Western European capitals, Soviet diplomats are subtly seeking to encourage the new wave of neutralism.

—At their proving grounds in Central Asia, the Russians are flight-testing a new intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) with 10 nuclear warheads, a super-rocket designed to hit targets in the United States with deadly accuracy.

These are just a few of the crucial problems and dangers facing the United States at a time of rising tension with the Soviet Union and general international upheaval. We are in possibly the most menacing period since World War II.

For America to be able to deal effectively with threats of this kind, we need precise, detailed and timely knowledge of what is happening around the globe on a daily basis. In other words, the greatest self-defense requirement for the United States, as seen by the Reagan Administration, is a first-rate capability for gathering and interpreting intelligence — as well as

for influencing events in foreign countries through secret means and resources.

But according to the most experienced experts in Washington, United States Intelligence — the Central Intelligence Agency and its military sister agencies — has been falling short of superb performance, to say the least, in recent years. This is believed to be true of both "human" and technical intelligence, from cloak-and-dagger espionage to the spy-in-the-sky (satellite) surveillance of Soviet nuclear advances.

The rebuilding, streamlining and modernizing of American intelligence operations looms, therefore, as one of the highest priorities for the Reagan Administration and the new leadership team it fielded earlier this year. The decision to revive and step up covert activities abroad — ranging from clandestine arms aid to anti-Soviet fighters in Afghanistan to efforts at gaining decisive political influence in the petroleum-rich Persian Gulf — is part of the current upgrading plan. Much more must be done, however, to restore primacy to the United States in the elusive world of intelligence.

The immediate responsibility for improving American intelligence lies with William J. Casey, the 68-year-old New York lawyer who was named by President Reagan as Director of Central Intelligence after managing his election campaign. Under the law, Casey is head of the entire intelligence community (comprising the CIA; the Pentagon-run National Security Agency (NSA), which specializes in technical intelligence; the Defense Intelligence Agency; and the State De-

ference to the low morale pervading the Agency since the Congressional investigations of the mid-1970's and continuing through the tenure of Admiral Stansfield Turner as CIA Director during the Carter Administration.

How well Casey will succeed remains a serious question mark in Washington. Though he has been touted as an "old hand" at intelligence, there are many doubts among intelligence professionals concerning his leadership qualities, including his limited experience in this field. Casey served for three wartime years as a London-based senior officer in the Office of Strategic Services, the CIA's forerunner, but did not join the CIA afterward. His only other direct exposure to intelligence was his service in 1976 on the Murphy Commission, which surveyed the work of the intelligence community. Casey's exposure

Tad Szulc has written 14 books on foreign policy. His first novel, *Diplomatic Immunity*, will be published by Simon & Schuster later this month.